

Travel

Where to go,
how to get there
and things to do



Woman Train Engineer Knows Right Handle to Pull on Heber Creeper Rail

BY JIM HILLS

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The beauty and the beast.

A pretty, young woman controlling a huge black monster belching fire and smoke.

The iron monster shakes and shudders. The woman senses the next move and cajoles the monster to do her beckoning and she is soon carried into her fantasy.

A medieval tale? No, it's a modern tale of a Santa Fe woman who realized her dream of becoming a railroad engineer.

Pamela Wingo, a partner in a Santa Fe advertising firm, had been interested in trains since childhood. "Then, about ten years ago, I was a tourist on a scenic railroad in Arizona and I asked if I could ride up front," she said. "It was great and I just kept coming back every weekend for the rest of the summer."

"It was on-the-job training," Wingo, 34, said.

Since that first day on the White Mountain Scenic Railroad (which is now closed Wingo says) she also has been a "guest engineer" on the Cumbres-Toltec narrow-gauge railroad at Chama, N.M.

Her most recent guest appearance was last Tuesday on the Heber Creeper for a P.M. Maga-

zine television segment.

"It was especially exciting for me because the engine that I learned on in New Mexico, Number 36, is now at Heber," Wingo said. "I call it mine, it's not mine but I like to say that. It was like seeing an old friend."

There is no licensing process for steam locomotive engineers

on scenic trains, but Wingo says she is one of only a few women engineers in the country. "I think there is one in Vermont or somewhere," she said. "Saying I'm the only woman steam locomotive engineer might be a bit too far reaching but there aren't very many of us."

Wingo's job responsibilities

prevent her from playing with trains as often as she would like but the time restraints make her passion for the old "puffer-bellys" even more intense.

"It is my avocation," she said. "I'd be glad to come back to run the Creeper again next year if they ask me."



Wingo checks operation of train's wheels

Dennis Patterson Photos



Pam Wingo steers Creeper